Ruby Circle of Friends: From Police to Peelers

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Jack Ruby was a man who lived on the seamy edges of society, a man who gained notoriety when he gunned down the assassin of President John F. Kennedy, a man whose life is detailed in thousands of pages of FBI documents.

The newly released raw files of the FBI include five cartons of material about the life of Ruby. In browsing through those records, it sometimes seems that everyone who had ever come into contact with Ruby was given a full field investigation by the FBI simply because he knew Ruby in school or had been part of his South Side Chicago milieu before he moved to Texas to become a nightclub owner.

Ruby's reputation is as a cantankerous and volatile man who acted as his own bouncer in the Carousel nightclub in Dallas. It is backed up by details in the FBI files, but the essential outlines are not much different now than they seemed in 1963 when he shoved a pistol into the stomach of Lee Harvey Oswald and fired as scores of policemen and millions of television viewers looked on.

RUBY WENT TO his grave insisting that he was not involved in a conspiracy to silence Oswald, that he shot Oswald on the spur of the moment to spare Kennedy's widow the ordeal of coming to a trial, and that he did not know Oswald or slain Dallas Police Pvt. J.D. Tippitt. He insisted until cancer put an end to his life that he suffered a blackout and does not remember the actual shooting on Nov. 24, 1963.

But the FBI meticulously recorded the comments of hundreds of people who knew Ruby back in Chicago, in his World War II service in the Army Air Corps, his hustling existence trying to make a buck and be a big shot and his later years as owner of one of the sleazier bars in the Dallas tenderloin.

His circle of acquaintances was surprisingly wide. Ruby was known by most of the policemen in Dallas because he was a police buff who liked to have policemen in his joint and who hung around the police station as a "gofer."

THE FBI FILES indicate that neither the mob nor the police had any high regard for Ruby. He was a quintessential small-time operator, but in his circle he had some clout. He knew girls named Tawney Angel, Darling Star, Kathy Kay and Tami True who take off the clothes for a living and will drink with a customer who buys champagne.

People in Dallas who knew him said he really had all he wanted: acceptance and a place in the scheme of things. That's why Ruby always carried a bankroll, cash, in his somewhat outdated suits. And when he had money, he also carried a .38-caliber Smith and Wesson pistol. It is not an uncommon thing to do in Texas, and no license is needed.

He was doing two typical things when he left the apartment he shared with George Senator on the morning of Nov. 24, 1963: He was going to send $25 to one of his girls who was broke 30 miles away in Fort Worth, and he had his gun.